Right now, vampire horror is having its heyday. Everyone wants to be around the vampires; they're the equivalent of the most popular kid on the block…the queen of the prom, the captain of the football team, that rock star you're just dying to meet. If I were a zombie, I would be jealous. So today, it's not vampires I'm writing about—it's the undead, as seen in one of the most interesting short films I've viewed recently: PLAGUE, directed by Matt Simpson and co-directed by and starring Joseph Avery.

PLAGUE, quite simply, gives a very different spin on zombie culture—a humanitarian spin. It focuses on the experience one might endure between being bitten and *turning*—that waiting, that pain and knowing the transformation is going to happen. PLAGUE hones in on that short window of time left for one to remain human.

Simpson, who provided us with the exclusive behind-the-scenes photos you see here, lives in Australia, yet PLAGUE was shot in England. He and I caught up with one another so I could find out more about the story behind this incredible short. Simpson begins by saying, "George A. Romero is the father of the modern zombie movie, there's no doubt about that. All of his films provide some kind of social commentary, and I wanted to pay homage to that idea. PLAGUE is essentially about a man named Vilhelm who is an illegal immigrant, desperate to escape his past and doing the best he can to start over in England. It just so happens that the world is ending at the same time.

"We wanted to tell a grim and melancholy tale that would take place against a contrasting, beautiful, silent landscape," he continues. "The actual undead themselves are closely related to the zombies we see in the original NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, as they shamble eerily towards their prey. These days, it's more common to see the running, infected type of zombie.

For me, a shuffling horde of undead has far more appeal."

Simpson knows his zombies and was sure what he wanted in creating PLAGUE. I was curious about how he got started in the industry, and he tells me, "I started out making a few music videos/shorts. It was a trial-and-error process; I taught myself the basics and eventually got a show reel together. I eventually got a very lucky break: I ended up on the set of HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE! Initially, I was a videographer/general assistant in Nick Dudman's creature effects department. When that contract was running out, I managed to switch departments and got a position on set as a video playback assistant, I pretty much just hung around on set until somebody gave me a job. Being on the set of such a major production taught me so much about protocol, and filmmaking in general; it was a very valuable experience for me as a filmmaker."

As usual, I was curious to hear what other movies, aside from the Romero films, were an influence on Simpson, since PLAGUE is so unique. "I grew up watching ultraviolent '80s slashers like FRIDAY THE 13TH and NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET," he recalls. "I also loved sci-fi horror like the early ALIEN films and TERMINATOR. So I got hooked into the genre pretty young. I'm still passionate about it, but often leave the cinema feeling disappointed. I hate the way modern Hollywood horror is so often watered down to get a kid's certificate. I want to see dark films for adults, and I guess that's a big part of what inspires me to make horror films. Rob Zombie has a great eye, I'm a big fan of his first HALLOWEEN remake; he's making the films he wants to, and I respect that.

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